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THE DISPOSAL OF MILITARY AIRCRAFT.

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The end of the war saw every belligerent with vast stocks of aircraft and aircraft supplies in all stages of usefulness, much of the material being absolutely new. The question of the best method of getting rid of this accumulation is one which has been agitating those responsible for its disposal for more than three years now, but no wholly satisfactory solution has yet been reached.

While the problem of the disposal of surplus material is in some degree a technical one to be settled by experts, at the same time it is of such vital importance to the future development of civil aviation and to the airplane industry that no one who is concerned about that development can escape being interested in disposal policies. Indeed, in a still broader sense the question is one of interest to every citizen, for the efficient and profitable disposal of $100,000,000 worth, more or less, of aeronautical material is no small item in governmental economy.

The disposal of military aircraft is vital to the industry because, if the Government's aircraft are to be cleared out by any other means than by using them to feed a bonfire, they must be sold at prices with which it is impossible for the constructors of new equipment to compete. Unless, then, the new airplanes are of such superior qualities that price is virtually no object to the purchaser it will be impossible to sell them for any work

* Taken from the Christian Science Monitor, August 21, 1922.

which can be done by an adapted war product. This statement applie to a certain extent even to sales to departments of the Government The United States Air Mail Service has been conducted ever since its beginning, and has made those wonderful efficiency records wit which the public is just becoming familiar, almost entirely with airplanes taken over directly from the army and only slightly converted.

If it be regretfully admitted that the disposal of military aircraft is certain to prove an unsettling influence in the industry for as long as it continues, the next question deals with the length of time that it should be allowed to continue. Is it best to let the Government stocks leak out little by little, setting prices which will keep them from going with a rush, or should a policy of quick sale at any figure be adopted? Great Britain has chosen the former plan in its most extreme form, disposal aircraft being sold there only after overhauling and then being sold almost entirely to foreign governments at prices only slightly below those of new aircraft. The United States, after tentative experiments with rather high prices, has thrown a large part of what material remains on the market for sale to the highest bidder regardless of price, thus going directly to the second of the alternatives mentioned above.

It is the writer's belief that the second plan is the better. Sale regardless of price will save the Government money in the long run, money which would be spent in years of storage and care for material some of which would ultimately prove itself unsalable

at any price except as junk. It will have the merit, too, of getting aircraft out into the hands of the public who would like to use them but are now prevented from doing so by expense.

There are a great number of men who flew during the war and who would like to continue to fly, but who are unable to pay the cost of a new airplane. If they could buy an army or navy training airplane for two or three hundred dollars many of them would be glad of the chance, provided that more communities follow the enlightened stand already taken by a few and establish state and municipal landing fields. To be sure, the supply of airplanes at such prices would soon be exhausted, but in the meantime the public would have had a chance to see flying on a scale hitherto undreamt of in America. A real demonstration of the use of airplanes by the hundreds, not as a stunt but as a regular means of transportation, should go far toward impressing those whose means would permit them to buy new airplanes from the constructors after those unfortunate individuals have been freed from the incubus of competition with the military surplus.

It may be said that the writer is too optimistic, and it may be doubted that ex-aviators would come forward in any numbers to buy, no matter how low the price. I am very hopeful of the appearance of such purchasers if governmental authorities will give them any encouragement to fly and will provide the ground organization to enable them to do so, but even if they did not appear, I should still advocate the same policy. Aircraft which are unsalable at high prices now, when they are four

years old, will be at least as unsalable at the same prices when they are eight or twelve years old. In the meantime their existence will unsettle the market for all types of airplanes and will cost the Government money. Rather than that, they should be sold now at prices where there would be a profit in breaking them up as junk. It is earnestly to be hoped that the war and navy departments will continue and extend the policy of inviting sealed bids for aeronautical material and letting it go to the highest bidder without limit.

There has recently been accomplished in England a feat which is in its way the most remarkable in the history of commercial aviation. During the month of June one of the English companies operating between London and Paris carried on its service for a whole month with a single airplane, making 84 trips between the two capitals with that one airplane. The total mileage for the month was a little more than 19,000, an average of more than 650 miles a day. It is probable that no other vehicle, on land or sea or in the air, has ever made such a record before. Certainly no automobile or ship has ever equaled it, and it seems very unlikely that any locomotive has such a mileage to its credit. The regular schedule called for two round trips every day except Sunday, more than 900 miles a day, and that schedule was lived up to every day when the weather permitted. On at least one occasion it was carried out for five days without a break, nearly 5000 miles being flown in the five days. There was not a single forced landing during the month.

Such a record is the best proof of what can be done with aerial transport. A line which can fly each of its airplanes 15,000 miles a month and can get 150,000 miles out of each airplane during its life can run at a profit without worrying about a subsidy, provided the route selected is one where people will come forward to ride in reasonable numbers. The operation of aircraft is a business like any other, and the rules for efficiency of management are the same as in any other enterprise. It is perhaps something more than a coincidence that the company which made the extraordinary record referred to has had long experience with motor transport and that the management of its aerial traffic is divided between experienced operators of aircraft and a traffic manager whose time before the war was devoted to the operation of motor busses.